

Opportunity to host PhD studentships in linked administrative data research

Background

1. ESRC is committed to delivering excellence in postgraduate training and supporting the development of highly capable and innovative researchers for a wide range of careers both within and beyond academia.
2. Administrative Data Research UK ([ADR UK](#)) is an ESRC investment which plays an important role in transforming the way researchers access the UK's wealth of public sector data. By joining up the abundance of administrative data already created by government and public bodies across the UK and making it available for researchers in a safe and secure way, we are enabling vital research that has the potential to lead to better informed policy decisions and more effective public services.
3. ADR UK has made significant advances in making de-identified administrative data easier for researchers to access securely, and there is now an impressive collection of new flagship datasets available through our partnership's trusted research environments across the UK. The [ADR UK website](#) can also point to further resources including explainer videos, training courses, and synthetic data which can be used to develop and test code, and communities of practice in which researchers can share ideas, questions, challenges, and successes.
4. ADR UK is offering new funding for [ESRC Doctoral Training Partnerships \(DTPs\)](#) to host PhD studentships focused on quantitative research using linked administrative data. Funding will be available for up to 30 PhD studentships, starting in October 2027. Please note that offers can only be made to be held at DTPs that have a successful outcome to their mid-term review which will be confirmed in January 2027.
5. The studentships available as part of this opportunity are aimed at continuing to support DTPs to develop their capacity for using linked administrative data. Thus, studentships funded in this way may make use of the additional support (such as training courses, synthetic data, mentorship, and access to user groups and experts) provided by ADR UK as part of its wider [Training and Capacity Building Strategy](#).

Opportunity

6. DTPs are invited to apply for funding to host up to five supervisor-led PhD studentships each, starting in October 2027. There are 30 studentships available in total, and the cohort of supervisors and the students selected will join ADR UK's [existing PhD programme](#) to develop exemplar case studies to promote wider use of administrative data for research.
7. Administrative data covers a wide range of topics; therefore, applications which are interdisciplinary are welcomed, incorporating at least 50% social science. Applicants are encouraged to consider how the [ADR UK mission](#) and [flagship datasets](#) can steer the research areas that PhDs are based around.

- Supervisors applying under this scheme should consider their strengths and weaknesses regarding large and complex datasets including preparation, data analysis and interpretation. The flagship datasets include a variety of data 'states'. For example, some datasets are well-curated and have already been used for early research, meaning that some code could be available to build on. Other datasets are more 'raw' and research using these will include improving the data and learning its idiosyncrasies. Additionally, some flagship datasets have previously been exploited for research, whilst others are new with less expertise already developed. Please carefully consider the information provided in the [flagship dataset webpage](#) before deciding what kind of research you are prepared for and able to support. You should provide details about how you can support students depending on which datasets you expect to access through this opportunity.

The studentships

- Studentships must be based on accredited pathways relevant to the subject area covered by the administrative dataset(s) expected to be accessed through this opportunity.
- We recognise that interdisciplinary studentships crossing traditional research boundaries involve additional training and that there can be added complexity in finalising projects. The actual length of studentships will depend on the structures available on the pathway and on the student's prior training. Funding will be provided on the basis of the notional cost of a studentship and the proposed duration of studentships.
- Funded students will be the responsibility of the ESRC DTP and subject to the same Terms and Conditions as students funded directly by ESRC/UKRI. These students must graduate with the same well-rounded skill set as all other ESRC-funded postgraduate students. This must include core research skills training including conceptual, general research and specialist skills along with Research in Practice. Applications must demonstrate how this will be achieved. ESRC's expectations for the content and delivery of postgraduate training it funds can be found in the [Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2022](#).
- Studentships must comply with both the ESRC DTP requirements and data access conditions set by the relevant public sector data owners throughout the project.
- Additional training and capacity building resources will be available through ADR UK's [Learning Hub](#) (see further details below).

The cohort

14. All students in the cohort are expected to start at the beginning of the 2027/28 academic year, unless agreed otherwise.
15. ADR UK expects to be able to fully fund 30 studentships, but the DTP may co-fund the studentships through their existing allocation or other sources to increase the total number of applications considered.
16. ADR UK reporting and monitoring requirements for all successful applicants, include:
 - a. Check-in meeting with both the supervisor(s) and the student within the first six months of the student's progression to the PhD stage of their studentship.
 - b. Quarterly reports providing a high-level narrative including summary of progress, and any actual or potential issues/risks.
 - c. End-of-award discussion with the supervisor(s) and student.Any additional reporting requirements will be discussed and agreed with successful applicants upon starting the studentship.

Contributions from ADR UK

17. The ADR UK website showcases a suite of flagship linked administrative datasets from across all four UK nations with information about the data, including the types of questions it could answer and the breadth of related relevant topics. The [Up-and-Coming Datasets flyer](#) also highlights forthcoming datasets that successful supervisors may wish to consider once they become available. These datasets may be included in an application as additional administrative datasets, provided that the use of an established Flagship Dataset from our website has already been specified in the application.
18. Each ADR UK flagship dataset has accompanying metadata on the website. Where necessary, ADR UK will support successful applicants in their applications for accessing the data through existing relationships with data owners and data processors.
19. ADR UK also provides resources on the [Learning Hub](#) including explainer videos and information about upcoming training courses, synthetic data, and themed user groups/networks where you find contact current users of the data.
20. ADR UK supports the inclusion of funding within bids to cover up to three months' internship or placement.

21. Through the ADR UK Peer Support Programme, supervisors intending to apply for this opportunity can book a one-to-one session (up to one hour) with a current or former ADR UK researcher who has experience of using a specific Flagship dataset. These informal sessions offer advice and feedback to support proposal development. Please note:
- Peer supporters will not provide dataset-specific feasibility advice.
 - Peer supporters are in no way responsible for writing, editing or ensuring successful applications.
 - Peer supporters agree to offer impartial advice only on topics they feel comfortable offering advice on.
 - Applicants should take the advice given in good faith. How they use the advice is their responsibility.
 - Advice is provided on an individual level and should not be considered generalisable.
- To request peer-to-peer support, please [complete this form](#).
22. ADR UK will host an applicant webinar from 11:00 – 12:15 on 12 May 2026, which will include more information on the application process, as well as an opportunity for Q&A with prospective applicants. [Register here](#).

Applications

23. Completed application packages must be sent by the DTP Director to ADRStudentships@esrc.ukri.org by **4pm** on **15 September 2026**. Applications must be coordinated and submitted by the DTP on behalf of its partnership. A completed application package consists of **two forms**:
- I. Form A – for completion by the Director of the DTP coordinating the process (one Form A on behalf of the DTP); and,
 - II. Form B – for completion by supervisors looking to host PhD studentships (up to five forms; one Form B for each studentship opportunity).
24. Assessments and funding decisions will be made by a panel which will include a former DTP director, experts in administrative data, and representatives from the ADR UK partnership.
25. Assessment will focus on:
- Alignment to the ADR UK mission to enable vital research that realises the potential of administrative data to lead to better informed policy decisions and more effective public services across various disciplines.
 - Alignment to the [ADR UK Training & Capacity Building Strategy](#) to support researchers trained to analyse complex linked administrative datasets.
 - The quality of the research environment and training provision to support the use of administrative data.
 - Supervisory arrangements, including supervisor expertise and capacity to host studentship focused on quantitative research using linked administrative data.
 - How studentships will contribute to the growing community of administrative data researchers.
- Note: While supervisors must host studentships that are using at least one flagship dataset, they may also include other research-ready administrative datasets in their application.
26. Assessment will also be guided by a portfolio approach, following assessment of quality. This will ensure that the studentships awarded are geographically representative of the UK and collectively address the range of ADR UK's flagship datasets and research themes.

27. All studentships awarded through this opportunity are expected to be recruited via a fair and transparent process aligned with [UKRI Good Practice Principles](#).
28. ESRC is committed to the values of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Applicants that wish to participate in this Funding Opportunity but find that they are barred from doing so as a consequence of ED&I considerations, should contact us at ADRStudentships@esrc.ukri.org.
29. If you have any further questions, please contact ADRStudentships@esrc.ukri.org.